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ABSTRACT

The essays included in this periodical focus on teaching elementary school children how to appreciate and how to write poetry. "Children, Poetry, and Memorization," by J.F.S. Smeall, outlines the historical basis, and perceptual limitations, of the use of print media alone in classroom instruction. Suggestions for encouraging children's recitation of poetry are based on the notion that memorization is best facilitated through a process of listening, imitating, and performing. Robert King's "Excursions into Poetry" presents ideas for using the following venicles to introduce poetry to children: haiku (limited by a specific topic or associated with an art project), rhyme utilizing jumprope chants and satires of popular ads, poetry by both children and adults, and structured and group-written poetry. A 20-item annotated bibliography of resources on poetry and creative writing for children is included. "A Bicentennial Note" contains ideas for teaching the concepts of past, present, and future through the development of children's personal histories. (KS)

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Children and Poetry

Children, Poetry and Memorization

by J. F. S. Smeall

Excursions into Poetry

by Robert King

A Bicentennial Note

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INSIGHTS into open education

Children, Poetry and Memorization

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ONE:

Between William Caxton and Thomas Edison, between the start of printing English and the start of recording it, are the SILENT CENTURIES. One doesn't hear imprints, even of poetry.

During the SILENT CENTURIES children are taught and learn to read silently. What the eye reads from print is to be kept within. Shame on an adult whose lips move while reading. That reveals what is taboo, a poetic (created) inner flow of rhythms, images, sentiments.

Was it St. Ambrose who shocked St. Augustine (long ago), or St. Augustine who shocked St. Ambrose, by NEVER moving his lips while reading to himself?

There are levels in the taboo, however, ranging from where no signs of a reader's inner rhythms are perceptible (except by electromyorgraphy) to where murmurings or whisperings of almost every word betray them. Yet all readers, recognizing the taboo, more or less habitually suppress overt voice-to-ear activity.[1]

During the SILENT CENTURIES print itself is suppressive. Where an ear hears four different first-vowels in Ask, Allow, Ate, and All, the eye sees only one, an A. Indeed the English ear's fourteen vowels are reduced to the eye's five and sometimes. When asked, What are the English vowels?" the child replies, "A, E, I, O, U, and sometimes. . . . "

During the SILENT CENTURIES the sociable ears give place. Eye rhythms replace ear rhythms. In schools silent bulletin boards display shapes of paper in rhythmical columns or rows. The child, withdrawn into his secret, private mind lets a desultory eye rove across unbreathable, spatial rhythms. They are decorated by crayons and paints, ornamented, illuminated, illustrated, but no ears listen.

Shapes of print come to be the signals of poetry. Do successive lines of print all start with capitals (decorated, illuminated?). Then the eye sees poetry. Are the successive lines grouped into stanzas? The eye sees poetry. Do minute splashes of ink disturb the successive pages of E. E. Cummings? The eye sees poetry?

TWO:

In silent and businesslike times to REMEMBER is to scratch, chisel, enter by writing, print, or xerox an ocular record, and then to store that record. Written out, polycopied in black ink, and stored, my loves shall ne'er grow old nor be forgot.

But American linguists studying unwritten Indian tongues, and Edison studying a primitive phonograph, and Milman Parry studying formulae from voice-to-ear epics, all lead to another, different REMEMBERING.

Without ocular records how did red Indians REMEMBER clauses from their treaties with white Indians? Did they REMEMBER sociably? Did each voice REMEMBER? Did they dance to REMEMBER? Did each clause have a tune?

Of Homer (in his unwritten times), Eric Havelock writes: "To control the collective MEMORY of society he had to establish control over the personal MEMORIES of individual human beings. . . . A relationship between the poet and the individual MEMORY . . . could be established [then] only by audible and visual presence . . . during the course of oral recitation."[2]

But today when we REMEMBER oral recitations, we REMEMBER embarrassments of childhood.--"What am I supposed to do? In front of the whole class? Why MEMORIZE at all? Why waste my energies? Why a poem? Why can't the teacher read it to us?"

"We normally MEMORIZE," Havelock writes, "something that has been read, and read NOT to us, but by us. . . . We . . . identify a series of printed signs. . . . We then . . . translate them into sounds which . . . we . . . mutter or recite 'to ourselves.' . . . This . . . combined with the solitariness of the act means that we draw exclusively upon our own psychic energies in order to get something into the MEMORY."[3]

In his classroom, with oral recitations in prospect, a child foresees and fears an expense of more energy than he may have--energy to break a taboo, to translate signs into sounds, to MEMORIZE these, to cope, solitary and without peer-example, with the whole class, energy even to worry about his teacher, who may be imposing a wasteful, embarrassing task.

And compare song and poem. To know a song we MEMORIZE its tune, tempo and words, with a view to performing it. And the proof of the knowing is in the performing. But handed silent words-on-paper, of an unknown song, can we ever know its tune or tempo or phrasing? Can our voices REMEMBER its silence? Can we perform it?

To MEMORIZE a poem, with a view to performing it, we must know its tune, tempo and phrasing, its ear-things: rimes, alliterations, pauses, intonation patterns. But for voices to know these things, the voices must hear them. And the psatial shapes of print are silent.

THREE:

I. Oral recitations of POETRY begin, therefore, with teachers deciding on a precise series of sounds that they'll deliver to their children's ears. They choose a POEM.

II. But to choose precise sounds they must murmur, whisper, mutter or recite to themselves with their own voices the tune, tempo and phrasings of their POEM.

III. And to deliver one pattern of precise sounds, and not a confusion of patterns, the teacher must first MEMORIZE the POEM. To see their children's ears, they must free their own eyes from print.

IV. Next, since sheer repetition is the least energy-draining kind of MEMORIZATION, the teacher delivers one verse or phrase of the POEM to a listening group and asks them to repeat it. And that is sociable as well.

V. To be sure the children's ears can voice the precise pattern, repeat the pattern to Johnny alone, and ask him to imitate it.

VI. Ask Johnny to repeat it again to the listening ears of his peers, and ask them to imitate his easy, sociable performance.

VII. And so too with Isobel and Earl and Fredegond, and the small boy so quiet that he has no name.

IX. Have that small boy wear a mask with a BIG MOUTH and offer a megaphone when, in his new, masked role, he is to perform. Have Fredegond put aside her Viking sword and whisper her imitation of the verse.

X. Nothing is written, or ditto'd or xeroxed, or dragged from a printed codex, even until the whole POEM is known and performed.

FOUR:

This Dakota method offers nothing that can be tacked to a bulletin board as a display for parents or members of the school board; a great disadvantage.

[1]Cf. Radomir Gaspar & David Brown, Perceptual Processes in Reading (London: Hutchinson Educational Ltd., 1973), p. 57. They refer to the experimental work reported in Ake W. Esfeldt, Silent Speech and Silent Reading (University of Stockholm, 1959).

[2]Eric Havelock, Preface to Plato (Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1963), pp. 145-147, and passim.

[3]Ibid., p. 147.

Excursions into Poetry

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CLEARING THE DECKS -- THE PROBLEM OF POETRY

Poetry and poetry-writing must present a special set of problems to us as teachers. We are led to this conclusion as we realize that we do not teach much creative writing of any kind in our classrooms, and poetry is the poor cousin when we do. Furthermore, we are only apparently helped by the growing number of kits and idea-files finding their way onto the commercial market.

Consider FLAIR, a handbook of creative writing ideas which contains 128 suggested activities. Nineteen of these deal with poetry. Eight of the nineteen are connected with rhyme and another nine are concerned with rigid syllabic or word structures (diamante, haiku, senryu, cinquains, etc.). Of the remaining two poetry ideas, one suggests that the students try to incorporate as many of their spelling words for that day as possible in a poem and the other is concerned with poems about "sounds."

The Language Arts Box, a recipe-box format of seemingly interesting games, activities and manipulatives gives the buyer 150 ideas. Twenty-seven of these are concerned with creative writing, and only one of these with poetry: the suggestion that students write down as many rhymes as possible for the word "pop" while popcorn is being made in the room. When it is finished, the children write poems using these rhyme words while eating the popcorn. The activity is called, appropriately enough, "Popcorn Poems."

Although with these kinds of friends the teacher of poetry and creative writing needs no enemies, such "helps" are being published. Where else can we, or I, or you turn? Luckily there are some published accounts and teacher-motivating books that can help us, for some of which you may check the concluding bibliography. But a great amount of good can be done if we simply re-think what we've been doing, or haven't been doing. The following mini-essays are my attempt to present some re-thinking I've been doing, and a few activities I've found helpful in the process of helping children open themselves into writing.

HAIKU -- THE SYLLABLE TRAP

I suspect that the Oriental forms of haiku, senryu, tanka, and sijo are so popular among teachers because of the apparent simplicity of the requirements: the number of syllables in the line. I believe in success-oriented activities, but we are not doing our students much of a favor (except as a counting exercise or a lesson in syllabification) by presenting the number of syllables required per line and routinely praising the result.

Myra Cohn Livingston feels that the haiku is "perhaps the most difficult of all [poetic forms] to write well." She presents a few pages of dissection of the normal approaches to this enigmatic form and a few pages of her own method of working with it in her recent book (see bibliography), but it is clear she does not feel it is the main gate into poetry for most elementary school children. She suggests a teacher being quite familiar with the form and recommends, among other reading, Harold Henderson's excellent Haiku in English. Ruth Kearney Carlson, not one in my book to be overly worried about some of the results of children's writing, expands her suggestions on haiku to include nine main qualities, lists seven reference sources, and suggests that students and teacher have many listening and reading experiences relating to this form.

Something, at any rate, is going wrong with this phase of poem-writing. No other form is so ubiquitous in America's class-

Editor's Note:

Robert King is also a poet. His poems have appeared in several literary publications.

rooms. And yet its results as usually handled, tend to be poetically disappointing.

The only way I've been comfortable with haiku with children is combining it with an art lesson. Briefly, each student has a number of sheets of paper, one color and a brush. A haiku is read, then re-read; a few seconds are given during which no painting is to be done, and then they are given the signal. I started out giving them seven seconds to paint their impression of what they had heard or "seen" in the haiku, but I later narrowed it to 4 seconds to get rid of literalistic interpretation -- trying to make that "tree" just right. When the children wanted to repeat the activity another day, they had to find haiku that they could do this to, and spent some time looking through poems for a "good" image to give to their waiting classmates.

One other successful haiku experience I have seen was a classroom teacher ruling, after discussion, that every haiku written that hour would have an element of "waiting" in it. The children, many of whom had not been exposed to this form before, produced a number of excellent short images that gave one a lingering sense of the open-endedness of "waiting." Other concepts would work as well, but obviously not just anything (such as "love" -- a sure way to demand little original work at any age). Nor is this "given element" unfair to the haiku. Many Japanese haiku have essentially the same first line (e.g. "The long summer day"), the poet's craft coming in what specific image can best set off this moody introductory concept.

But unless the teacher is prepared to do a rather large amount of homework on the haiku before presenting it to a class, the form will probably never escape beyond the correct number of syllables per line.

IS THERE A TIME FOR SOME RHYME?

Statement: Children love rhyme.

Answer: True. In a recent piece of research[1] the top 25 favorite poems of children all used rhyme, and a characteristic of the least liked 25 poems was an absence of rhyme. However, this can hardly be taken as an indication of children's learning -- the major point uncovered by the research was that the children had been exposed to very little poetry and almost no poem-writing in school. In this vacuum, where only Dr. Seuss and a parent remembering some older favorite exist, children can only know what they've observed. Rhyme in writing a poem (perhaps differentiated from the enjoyment of reading a rhymed poem) is difficult for accomplished poets -- it is certainly debilitating to thought and feeling when attempted by people with a limited vocabulary to begin with. If a poem is rhyme, then rhyme is a poem and the teacher content with a series of "pigs" wearing "wigs" and dancing "_____" is helping no one.

Statement: But . . . but is there no place for rhyme in children's language art?

Answer: Yes, though probably not in serious or emotional poetry. The limerick seems to be a place to work with rhyme successfully, a poem-form where strange, unusual, or creative rhymes can be sought out. Children are also enthralled with parodies (the last playground classic I heard was an exceptionally deft take-off on the McDonald's hamburger commercial) and satires of popular ads as well as songs and jump-rope chants are perfect places to experiment with rhyme for humorous effect. The same principle holds true for "meter" and rhythm. While it is difficult as well as irrelevant for children to "learn" iambics and trochaics, it is an interesting challenge to fit new words into a known song form or melody. Such experiences are enjoyable, creative, and educational -- they contain a lot of the enjoyment of quick, humorous or competitive poetry, and yet do not give the student the false notion that anything that rhymes is a poem.

[1] Ann Terry. Children's Poetry Preferences: A National Survey of Upper Elementary Grades. NCTE, 1972, 1974. Illinois, Urbana, National Council of Teachers of English.

HOW TO GET POETRY INTO THE CLASSROOM: INTRODUCTIONS

1. POETRY BY CHILDREN

Just as adults, attempting to begin writing a poem, might be intimidated by comparing themselves with Shakespeare, children obviously realize their lack of skill compared to an Eleanor Farjeon, an Eve Merriam, or a Robert Frost. One of the best ways I've found to "introduce" poetry to a third-grade is to ask if they want to hear some poems other third-graders have written. Readers who were disappointed that Koch's Wishes, Lies and Dreams had so few "ideas" and so many poems by children missed one of the advantages of that book: as an anthology that children could read and react to. Obviously, they would not always react in a positive way. But "I-can-do-better-than-that" has been the impetus for many a poem and novel in the adult world of literature.

Richard Lewis' Miracles and The Wind and The Rain are the most well-known volumes of children's poetry, but there are others including Stephen Dunning's selection of poems Mad, Sad, and Glad as well as several items from the Teachers and Writers Collaborative (see bibliography).

2. REAL POEMS

If the teacher has few well-liked or interesting poems, it seems unfair to ask the students to have any. Kenneth Koch does much for the idea of using "real" poems as a take-off for children's writing in Rose, Where Did You Get That Red? He details a series of experiences in which he read poems he particularly liked (and therefore could support with his adult interest), answered questions about them, and then utilized the structure or method or subject of those poems for the students' own writing. Blake's "The Tiger" was then simply defined as: a poet asking questions of an animal. Yes, it could be a flower, he said upon questioning by a student, and the first line of that poem became the title for Koch's book.

I have had luck with Masters' Spoon River Anthology on a 6-8 grade level -- the obvious irony and negative/positive characterizations of those dead citizen's epitaphs have sparked classroom work in characterization, poem structure, and a number of unique ways to die. I also think of D. H. Lawrence's poems about animals, William Carlos Williams' short image poems, and May Swenson's riddle poems (Poems to Solve) as likely possibilities. The reader will note that these are not so-called children's poets. I still think the clever rhymes and tricky meters of most of our children's poets could warn off the beginning young writer.

3. GROUP POEMS

Many teachers have tried having lines suggested by the class, and thus come up with a group poem -- an idea that works when it works. I like to combine the group-process with a certain random quality in my favorite poetry/ice-breaking activity:

Everybody write a title for a poem at the top of a page, a made-up title, something you'd like to see a poem written about. No, you won't have to write it.

Okay? Now pass it to the left. Now you've got a new title in front of you. Write one line, just the first line, of that poem. Doesn't have to be a complete sentence, just a line (I never explain what a "line" is, and yet they all write one). Now fold it over in a pleat so the first line is hidden, but the title is visible (you'll have to try it; I can't describe it). Now pass it on.

Okay, you've got a new title, but you can't see the first line. Write the next line of that poem.

This can go on as long as you wish -- I usually keep it at five or six lines. Everybody then gets to unfold their paper and read the resulting poems. Usually a class will start showing them to each other without being asked, giving opinions, laughing, remarking on the "neatness" or "grossness" or "weirdness" of some of the poems.

Points I like to remember: (1) These are poems. You may be surprised at how many actually "turn out" as a result of this

random, blind process. A lot of them will stand on their own as poems, and they will usually be more unlike each other than if each child had written the complete poem. (2) The group effort alleviates anxiety -- that terrible responsibility felt by all of us when writing something to hand in or show to someone. (3) It's easier to make judgments, criticize, and revise these poems since no one person is "responsible" for something that doesn't sound right. (4) This 'random' process shows that you don't have to "think up" a whole poem before you write, a concept common to school children (and perhaps adults) that would, if true, have eliminated 75% of the poetry in the world. (5) The work, including the title -- the idea -- is entirely the students'. They are working with each other's titles and starters, not the teacher's.

Variations could include small groups writing individual lines on a common title, then randomly or intentionally pooling their lines to make a poem. Two poems. Three. Or, if your interest is in getting more oral exercise, write the lines individually and then go around a circle reading them one at a time. The game element of seeing-what's going-to-come-next often outweighs a possible disinclination to read one's own work outloud.

HOW TO BUILD A POEM: STRUCTURES FOR NEW THOUGHTS

One approach to poetry-writing, and one which I have personally and professionally discovered to have beneficial results, could best be described as a "structural" approach. Margaret Langdon (see bibliography) utilized this approach when she asked the children to imagine a spider -- excuse me, she told the children there was a spider -- in the corner of the room, and that they should write a line, quickly, describing the creature. Then, before many had recovered their usual aplomb, she directed them into the second line, the third, describe its legs, describe its web, describe a contrast between the web and the spider, and so forth. The "structuring" of their perceptions helped the students to (1) have a next line in the first place and (2) be freer with their sensitivity and creativity because they weren't involved in casting about for a subject (or form) to please the teacher. Kenneth Koch also utilizes this method when he helps children explore the surrealistic world of writing poems in which there's a color, a vegetable, a comic-book hero, and the name of a city in each line.

A beginning, a very beginning, for younger writers is the familiar Who? When? Where? What? quartet. This can be used in a "blind" writing activity quite well -- each child writes the answer to a Who? Be prepared for other children's names to crop up quite frequently. Papers are then folded over and passed on with each child answering, as wildly or romantically or crazily or prettily as possible, a When? question. The process is repeated until you have a number of poems explaining that "David H./one night about midnight/in the bottom of a big hole full of monsters/ate 10 gallons of ice-cream" or some similar adventure.

As the students become more adept at this type of thing, the questions become more advanced. In order to get a certain kind of romantic poem I have used:

Line one: Where are you?

Line two: What do you see from that position?

Line three: What would you have felt about that when you were younger?

Line four: What do you feel now?

The first two questions are particularly helpful in getting writers to "be" somewhere, to get some immediate imagined visualizations instead of a stereotypical "poem-subject."

I have made a wheel out of a cardboard pizza-plate with a number of different questions in the marked-off sections and a spinner. The student can decide on the subject, then use one spin of the wheel for each line. Questions range from "What color is it?" to "Why might you feel angry about it?" to "How could you keep it forever?"

Again, one advantage of this technique is the constant creation of new ideas -- the poem going in completely unexpected directions. The

most stereotyped subject will become creative when creative questions are asked about it. Such an approach does not take the place of the child's own personal responses in written form, of course. But as beginning exercises, as energizers of creative thought, they can often help.

A SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY ON POETRY/CREATIVE WRITING

Applegate, Mauree. Easy in English. (Harper & Row, 1960.) (Many ideas for teachers concerned with creativity--imaginative approach to teaching of language arts. Author has also written Freeing Children to Write and Helping Children Write.)

Arnstein, Flora J. Poetry and the Child. (Dover Pub., NY, 1962.) (NCTE: $2.00.) Not about creative writing as such, this book does talk about introducing poetry to children, an important activity to parallel their own efforts.

Arnstein, Flora J. Children Write Poetry. (Dover, NY, 1967.) 1967 is a re-issue date--book written much earlier but still well worth reading. Strong arguments against traditional conceptions of poetry in both form and sentiment.

Bolton, Eric J. Verse Writing in the Schools. (Pergamon Press, NY.) From experience with British secondary school students, many ideas apply to any age, any nation. Primary obstacle is recognized as traditional student concept of poetry: "pretty" or "sentimental" thoughts in a "rhyme" form.

Bowen, Mary E. and Perry, Walter T. Slithery Snakes and Other Aids to Children's Writing. (Appleton Century Crofts, NY.) Colorful, interesting collection of ideas--a number of teachers I know have purchased this as their 'first' book on creative writing.

Boyd, Gertrude A. Teaching Poetry in the Elementary School. (Merrill Publishing Co., Columbus, OH, 1973.) No ideas not in other books but more details on activities in many places than afforded by the kits and card-files approach. Most poetry-writing activities rhymed or syllabic forms, although "free verse" and "concrete poetry" are included. A 78-item bibliography of poems and poets children might enjoy would be helpful for teachers.

Burrows, Alvira Trout, Doris C. Jackson and Dorothy O. Saunders. They All Want to Write. (Prentice Hall, NY, 1964.) One of the very early books on children's writing. Contains a chapter on writing poetry with young children and with those in the later grades. Also includes a supplement of verse written by children seven to ten years of age.

Carlson, Ruth Kearney. Writing Aids Through the Grades. (Teachers' College Press, Columbia University, 1970.) "One hundred eighty-six developmental writing activities." Ms. Carlson is known for her several published articles dealing with creative writing. Her ideas run the gamut from the familiar ("feeling" boxes for sensory experiences) to the avant-guarde ('concrete poetry') and do provide some starting places. I have personal problems with the way the ideas are written--either not enough background to give the teacher a ready approach without a lot of "homework" (not necessarily a bad idea) or too many suggestions given that might lure an unsuspecting teacher.

As with other "notebooks" and "collections" of ideas, many ideas are too general (Cartoons "can be distributed and used to motivate ideas for paragraphs, stories, and poems" is the complete suggestion given as idea 78, for example) or too specific (in suggestion 75, collages are suggested, topics as well: "Loneliness--a mass of pictures of lonely people in deserted places")

Esbensen, Barbara Juster. A Celebration of Bees: Helping Children Write Poetry. (Winston Press, Minneapolis, 1975.) Some expected forms well-talked about (haiku, cinquain) as well as other suggestions not frequently made or as detailed (sea songs, moods and emotions).

Many examples of children's writing, so the book is good for that purpose, although the author's comments tend to be enthusiastically uncritical. Still there is a sense of real children writing in this book.

Hopkins, Lee Bennett. Pass the Poetry, Please! (Citation Press, NY, 1972.) The author is connected with Scholastic Magazine and some of the material suggested stems from that source, but this is not a "publisher's publication." Many ideas for writing, but the strong point of this book is the number of references and sources outlined, from lives of children's poets to anthologies available, recordings, posters, etc. A good resource book.

Koch, Kenneth. Wishes, Lies and Dreams. (Vintage, NY.) A major work of the "new" approach and emphasis on children's poetry. A description of writing projects the author, a poet, brought to his work with children in the New York school system. Much of the book consists of examples of the children's writing so it can also function as an anthology of interest to children.

Koch, Kenneth. Rose, Where Did You Get That Red? (Vintage, NY.) Koch's second book on the subject, this details how the poet used his favorite poems -- abstracting a "device" or "structure" from the poem to help his students practice on their own. Blake's Tyger, Tyger was discussed as a poem where the author asks questions of an animal -- students then wrote their own questions to their own animal or plant. Important for imitating this method is the teacher having some favorite poems that lend themselves to this use. A major idea applicable to most poems and any age the teacher may be working with.

Langdon, Margaret. Let the Children Write. (Longman Group, London, 1970.) A British teacher, Langdon worked with the essence of poetry without calling it that (the children helped decide on the 'name' of the form as "intensive writing") through a variety of structural and thematic approaches. An excellent look into an effective approach.

Livingston, Myra Cohn. When You Are Alone/It Keeps You Capone. (Atheneum, New York, 1973.) Not merely "ideas," the methods and approaches and examples in this book should help teachers think about how they approach writing, whether they agree or disagree with Ms. Livingston -- at least that is my experience. In many cases she chronicles both the uses and abuses of forms, approaches, and poems and manages to sound like a real person with real children getting to real poetry.

Painter, Helen. Poetry and the Child. (International Reading Association, Delaware, 1970.) Not directly concerned with creative writing, but valuable introduction to introducing children to poetry.

Pease, D. Creative Writing in the Elementary School. (Exposition Press, 1964.) Writing as an extension of the child's own thought processes; suggestions and techniques offered to help motivate and reinforce child's written efforts.

Rogers, Vincent, ed.. Teaching Children in the British Primary School. (Macmillan Company, London, 1971.) A good chapter on "Teaching Children to Write Creatively."

Wolsch, Robert A. Poetic Composition Through the Grades. (Teachers' College Press, Columbia University, NY, 1970.) Idea-provoking, but too much emphasis on technique for this reader.

The Whole Word Catalogue. Teachers and Writers Collaborative. c/o PS. 3, 490 Hudson Street, New York, NY. The only commercial collection of ideas and suggestions this reader would want to recommend. (Compare negative comments in this issue's text on such efforts as The Language Arts Box and Flair.) Pages and pages of ideas, assignments, materials. Also a bibliography of books and magazines, although related more to upper grades.

Teachers and Writers Collaborative Newsletter. Available from above address. Each issue relates ideas, notes from searching and discovery. First attempts, second thoughts, successes, problems. A very "real" newsletter of unparalleled help in the area of creative writing.

A Bicentennial Note

The ideas presented this month come from "The Outdoor Classroom", Winter 1976 publication of the Teacher Resource Center, Audubon Center, Greenwich, Connecticut and are reprinted with their permission.

Every place and everyone has a past, a present and a future. Most people are only slightly aware of the present let alone of the past. How can we expect to know where we are if we don't know where we've been?

There are many ways to find out about our past. All one need do is to learn how to read the clues. The ability to read one's past can be likened to being a detective. Knowing to ask the questions "who, what, where, when, how and why" is the first step in solving the mystery. Once these clues have been gathered it is up to the detective to piece the puzzle together.

You might want your students to start by discovering their own personal history. How much do they really know about themselves?

I. Put Your Life on a Line

Draw a line across a piece of paper and mark one end birth and the other end your present age. Divide the line into as many years as you are old. In the space below the line write all the events you can remember for each year. You might want to write a story about each event or about:

1. The most exciting thing that happened to you last year.
2. Your funniest experience.
3. Who are you?
4. If you could go back in time, what period of history would you choose?
5. You are proud . . .
6. The quietest sound in the world, to you is . . .
7. If you could change the world you would . . .

II. What famous events happened throughout your students' lives?

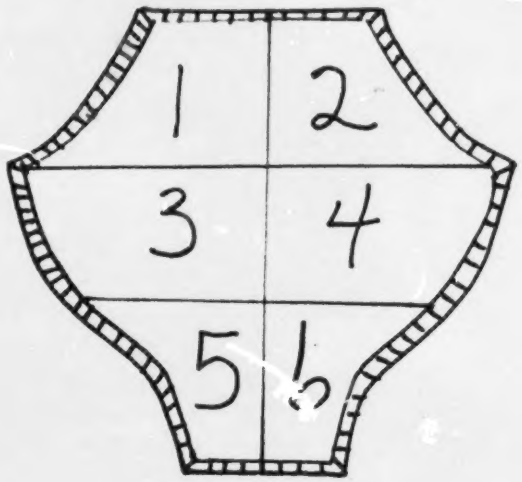
III. CREATE A TIME CAPSULE

It might be interesting to have your students make a personal time capsule. Have each student fill a box with items that tell the story of their life and time. Things they might include are:

- a newspaper
- a list of all the smells you smelt during one day
- a picture of each student
- a grocery receipt listing the items bought
- something you made or wrote at school
- personal treasures -- a favorite rock, a feather, baseball cards, etc.

Put the capsules away and open them at the end of the school year. Discuss changes, growth and values.

IV. CREATE YOUR OWN COAT OF ARMS



Answer the following questions by drawing in the approximate area on your coat of arms - a picture, design, or symbol;

1. What do you regard as your greatest personal achievement to date?

2. What do you regard as your family's greatest achievement?

3. What is the one thing that other people can do to make you happy?

4. What is a personal motto you live by?

5. What would you do if you had one year to live and you were guaranteed success in whatever you attempted?

6. What three things would you most like to be said of you if you died today?

V. Two useful books for additional activities are:

1. Old Glory. The America the Beautiful Fund. New York, N.Y.: Warner Books, Inc. 1973.

   Old Glory contains a pictorial report on the Grass Roots History Movement in America. In addition, the last half of this book, entitled "The First Hometown Primer", is an excellent account of activities one can participate in to discover one's personal history, family history and hometown history.

2. Ourselves - Stages 1 and 2. Richards, Roy. New York, N.Y.: McDonald Educational. 1973.

   This book aims at helping teachers to help children (5-13 years) to learn science through first-hand experiences.

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